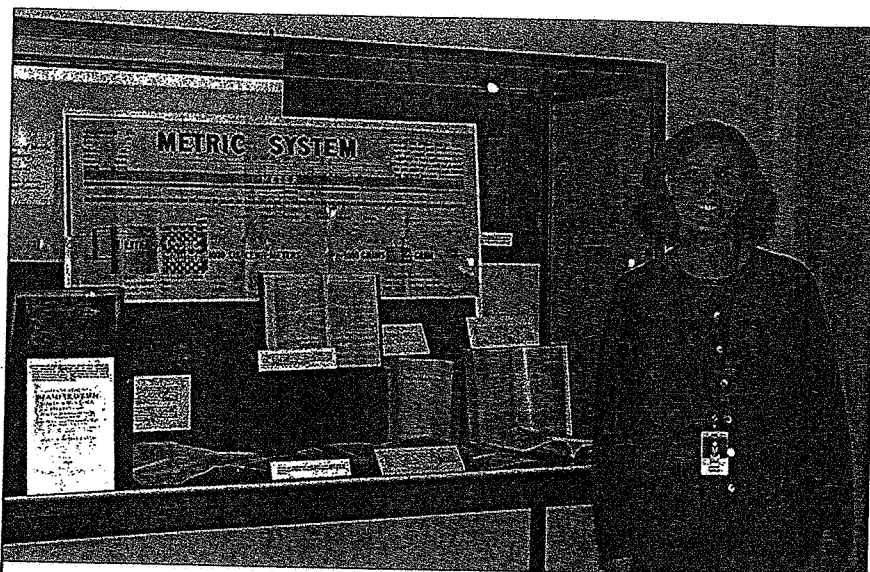


Metric History Treasures Exhibited by NIST Research Library



The NIST Museum's exhibit of rare metric books is shown with Technical Services Librarian Harriet Hassler, who set up the display.

By Harriet Hassler, NIST Technical Service Librarian

Coinciding with National Metric Week, on 6 October 2003, the National Institute of Standards and Technology's (NIST) Information Services Division launched a new exhibit featuring some of the treasures of metric history held in the NIST Research Library's Historical Book Collection.

The earliest of these treasures is the 1670 work of French cleric Gabriel Mouton, *Observationes Diametrorum Solis et Lunae Apparentium*. Mouton's book is the earliest known publication suggesting a decimal system of measurement using a logical system of prefixes. Like the later metric system, Mouton's system had a base unit of length measurement derived from the dimensions of the earth's meridian.

Also on display are two of several books the Library owns from the early French Republic period when the metric system was developed. These include the French law of 1795 adopting the "mesures republicaines." Another work from 1801 shows a table of metric units with corresponding "vulgaire," or common, names for each unit. French law authorized the use of common names for some units when the official term with a Greek or Latin prefix was lengthy. Authorized common names changed over time. For example, the unit officially called the kilogram could also, at different times, legally be referred to as the "livre" or the "grave."

Another notable work on display is John Quincy Adams' *Report Upon Weights and Measures*, prepared for Congress in 1821. Adams' thorough examination of the question of adopting the "French system" in the United States was later used by both pro- and anti-metric groups to bolster their positions. Adams called the metric system "the greatest invention of human ingenuity since that of printing," but also concluded that the time was not ripe for a compulsory conversion to metric in the United States.

The Library is also displaying a copy of the 1875 *Treaty of the Meter* that was sent to Congress by President Rutherford B. Hayes in 1878. The Treaty established the International Bureau of Weights and Measures (the BIPM). Another interesting item in the collection is a group of late 19th century pamphlets from U.S. industry groups that capture the spirit of the metric debate of the time. Also shown is an anti-metric book from 1884 by Charles A.L. Totten, *An Important Question in Metrology... A Challenge*

METRIC-ONLY LABELING FORUM SCHEDULED BY NIST

According to Dr. Peter A. Wolf, Metric Coordinator for the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), the Laws and Metric Group, and the National Conference on Weights & Measures has scheduled a meeting of the Coalition for Permissible Metric-Only Labeling on 6 November. Purpose of the Forum is to "bring together a coalition of manufacturers, packagers, exporters/importers, retailers, and other interested parties to support an amendment to the Fair Packaging and Labeling Act for permissible metric-only labeling." Also discussed will be a number of subjects related to metric-only labeling. USMA President Lorelle Young has been invited to this meeting and will attend. Also planning to attend is *Metric Today's* new editor, Paul Trusten, who will provide a report on this Forum in the January-February newsletter.

Following is the Agenda. This Forum is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Commerce, and will be held at its Washington D.C. location from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

- Introductions
- NIST report on metric labeling activities and providing updates to the 2002 Forum Report, including a review of changes in state labeling laws
- Discussions on introducing the amendment to Congress, planning support for the FPLA amendment, and identifying/addressing areas of opposition
- NIST presentation on draft labeling guide
- Plans for reporting activities and future meetings *MT*

